

"A father is neither an anchor to hold us back, nor a sail to take us there, but a guiding light whose love shows us the way." (unknown)

To the many Beacons who have safely guided us through the years...our wonderful dads, and those who assumed a paternal role in any way...We celebrate you this Father's Day and wish you a basketful of love, respect and gratitude. To those we hold in our hearts, we honour you with pride and joyful remembrance. A very Happy Father's Day to all!



Connecting

May 2021

Please Take Time to Smell the Roses

Bereavement is a time when we become acutely aware of how the littlest things mean the most. A kind word, an unexpected coffee and donut left on our doorstep, someone to walk the dog, or a handwritten letter (mailed by Canada Post). Even a single rose that quickly hung its head (as though reacting to our sadness) can deliver a message of warmth and empathy from the heart that sent it.

When we find ourselves alone, and lonely...we search for whatever might bring a peaceful and healing vibe into our space. We seek solace from people and pets that can comfort us. Our friends in the plant community also contribute in meaningful ways to our wellbeing and recovery after a significant loss. Hobby-gardeners are astonished at how much they enjoy watching things come to life; and attest to the fact that there is something very "therapeutic" about tending to plants after a busy day at the office or a winter of isolation counting cobwebs around us. We send

flowers when somebody is sick or dies, to celebrate a special event or simply to beautify our surroundings. It is important to note that some decline flowers while they grieve, citing their fear of having to dispose of yet another living thing that will soon wither and die. That is okay; and their feelings should be respected. But for others, plants can serve as a gesture of love, an invitation to relax and enjoy the beauty and smell of the arrangement—to inject some peace and tranquility in turbulent times. Plants can be resilient, unassuming, low- maintenance companions for the bereaved. They are there for us 24/7. Quiet and gentle when you need them to be; bright and showy when you need something to take away the darkness and bring some colour and vitality to your space. They serve us in so many ways; improving our lives while demanding little in return....



Flowers generate happiness.

They improve people's moods and reduce stress-related depression; increasing levels of positive energy by helping one to feel secure and relaxed. The lovely scents of the various trees and flowers activate our senses and it truly is a magical time of year when the Lilacs, Lavender, or Apple Blossoms fill the air. (Those with allergies, however, may not be as thrilled with the olfactory buffet!)

Increases physical activity.

Gardening or being near a park offers an increased sense of vitality, energy level and improves the state of mind.

Learning.

Research shows that children who spend time around plants learn better. Those with Attention Deficit Disorder find an improved ability to focus, concentrate and engage more with their surroundings. The soothing effects of plants helps to minimize the distractions that normally occupy their minds.



Mental Health.

Studies have proven that those who spend more time outdoors have better mental health and a more positive outlook on life. Those who spend some time cultivating plants have less stress. Plants soothe people and provide a way for us to channel stress into nurturing. Gardening can act as therapy for those undergoing trauma. The simple act of caring for a plant or garden and using that nurturing part of us is a way for people to work thru the issues surrounding traumatic events and the effects of PTSD.



Perceived Quality of Life.

We often associate beautifully landscaped areas with a higher quality of life, a gentle, cleaner community, reduced crime and more community cohesion. Trees and parks give folks a place and a reason to come together and tighter-knit communities are born.

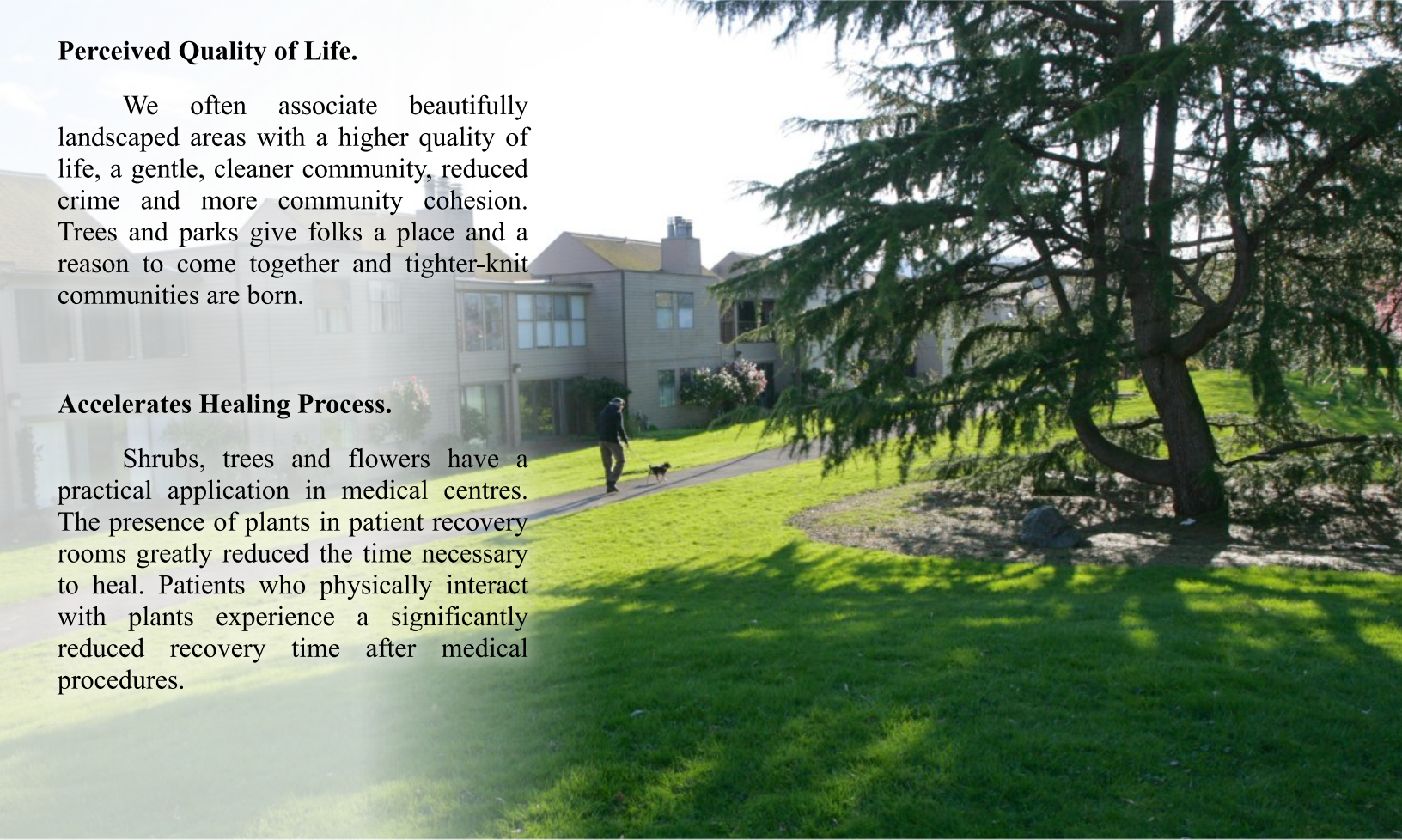
Accelerates Healing Process.

Shrubs, trees and flowers have a practical application in medical centres. The presence of plants in patient recovery rooms greatly reduced the time necessary to heal. Patients who physically interact with plants experience a significantly reduced recovery time after medical procedures.

Improves Relationships/Compassion.

Plants affect the level of compassion that people feel for others. Those who spend more time around plants are much more likely to try and help others, and usually have more advanced social relationships. They also tend to care more about the environment in which they live and have more concern and empathy towards others. So what is it about plants that resonates with people? Well, we rely on each other for our sheer existence.

Photosynthesis and respiration are two essential processes that allow life to sustain on earth in a cyclical fashion. Plants help humans breathe by providing us with oxygen; and humans help plants to breathe by providing them with carbon dioxide. We share many similarities...we are both living and will die at some point in our lives. We both have reproductive systems, and established systems for converting and using energy, and have various ways of protecting ourselves. If we are mindful to our surroundings, plants teach us that.



Their struggle for existence becomes their strength.

Trees demonstrate this well. When they are directly exposed to inclement weather, they respond by growing thicker roots and trunks. This makes them stronger and more stable than those that are protected from any harsh changes. They turn to face the sun. No matter what is going on around them, they always turn to face the light, or the healing force of the sunshine. They instinctively soak up its rays converting it into energy to become strong, healthy plants. They spend no time focused on the weeds and predators around them. They don't let their surrounding circumstances define them. When they find the seed of life has planted them in a shady spot with little sunlight, they climb the trunks of trees to reach the light. If there is not enough water to survive, they will grow deeper roots or find a way to store it in their leaves until needed. We, too, should not let the circumstances of our loss and our mourning cripple us so that we have no reason for doing our best, striving always to reach our potential.



Concentration & memory.

Being around plants in the home and workplace helps people concentrate and perform better, with greater accuracy, and improves attention span by 20%.



Plants adapt to the changing seasons.

They become frugal with their resources during the winter months. They take advantage of the opportunity for new growth in spring. They make and store food during the long summer sunlight hours. They prepare for winter by shedding their leaves to avoid using up unnecessary resources. Grief is like a season in our lives....it will change with time as seasons do. We can strive to embrace change rather than fight it. We can try to modify our lives in order to preserve our own resources so that we are not left wanting or needing when another crisis presents itself. We can take advantage of new friendships, opportunities, and adventures. Nothing stays the same and we cannot stop certain things from happening in our lives. The only thing we can do is to try different coping techniques to help us adapt to those changes with an acceptance of our new reality as it is, with optimism and a sense of peaceful purpose.



Plants don't set limits on how big they can grow.

Holding onto limiting beliefs is the greatest destroyer of our human potential. "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." (Henry Ford) There is a feeling of inadequacy that overtakes us when we grieve that diminishes our self-of-self and ability to function from a place of wisdom, experience, and confidence-- leaving us afraid to make decisions, or do what we have done for years without anguish or concern, and a feeling of inadequacy. Plants also die when they must...sometimes we are never quite sure why, despite our best efforts to keep them viable. So we are reminded that death does not ask our permission and it is not up to us to feel entitled to guilt when there should be none. Every plant, like every person leaves when it is their time.

This time of social isolation and distancing and the warmer weather has kicked up an urgency to head to the nearest greenhouse. The aisles are bustling with anxious and excited shoppers rushing to grab the last white geranium (I'm talking to you lady in red sweatpants!) We feel like we have an instant camaraderie even with strangers, a kinship for loving plants, hobby gardening, and playing in the dirt. We connect; and understand each other. I always feel rejuvenated after my nursery runs, feeling positive and joyful in the presence of so many species of plants-- the colours, and the uniqueness of each one. We too have so much to offer. And we just need that shot of virtual fertilizer that encourages us to go back to our roots and know that we have everything we need to stabilize, strengthen and nourish us so we too can stand tall, turn towards the sun and hover boldly looking upwards for light, energy, and inspiration to keep going higher. When one is grief

stricken, it is the wilted petunia we bring back to life or the sign of a new shoot on a houseplant that often brings a lift to the most downtrodden spirits.

Don't be surprised if you are getting the answers you seek from the most unlikely places. Plants are companions, teachers, and heart-warmers. Think about what they might be telling you. We all bloom at different times, some later than others, and everyone has their special time to shine and then we have a period of dormancy. Grief does not insist we grieve on demand, for a certain length of time. So we can let ourselves be in control of our own destiny...just as plants allow themselves to "just be" what they are. Many plants do much better when planted in groups, making us wonder if they support each other like people do and thrive while doing so.

Snowdrops

Always remember that if a small, delicate flower can find the strength to push its way through hard, frozen ground year after year, then the possibilities for humans are endless. We have so much more strength and potential than we realize. We just need to learn how to use it in the correct way."

(E. Sirrell)



Sunflowers:

Sunflowers turn according to the position of the sun. In other words, they “chase the sun”. The first lesson we learn from these happy flowers is that we should all find the sunshine for warmth and light in our lives. What is the sunshine in your life? What things speak peace and rest to your soul? What warms your heart and gets you ready to face another day? Is it your faith? Is it your family? Does music inspire you and get you going? Where do you draw your strength from?

Have you ever wondered what happens on cloudy and rainy days when the sun is completely covered by clouds? Perhaps you think the sunflower withers or turns its head towards the ground. Well, they turn towards each other. Some say it is to share their energy, while others argue that it is simply to look towards the direction that they think the sun might be if it weren't cloudy, a Heliotropism phenomenon which causes a particular type of turning when under the influence of light, but I like to think it is simply because they look to their nearest and dearest for light and reassurance that the sun will come out again tomorrow. Now let's apply this reflection to our lives, most particularly these days travelling our own grief journey. The bereaved are generally low spirited, vulnerable, lonely, self-insulating and often depressed. What if we were to follow the example of the majestic sunflowers...i.e. “Supporting and empowering each other”.

Grief robs us of so many things. We have no enthusiasm about greeting a new day. Negativity is much more likely to prevail in those “dark days” after a loss, even if we are smack dab in the sunny days of summer.

Yet our plant world never fails to impress and encourage us...poking thru the soil even as the snow is barely gone, showing us that “yes, we can” survive another crazy Canadian winter. This “yes we can” attitude pushes us to come to life again and bloom, and flourish, and showcase the best of ourselves.



There is nothing profound in this month's article. Just a simple truth. We support others and they in turn fill our cups as well. Plants, animals, and stars that we have yet to explore are all interconnected. Animals sense and feel our sorrow. Plants flourish when they are spoken to. All living things rely on homeostasis for their wellbeing. That is any self-regulating process by which an organism tends to maintain stability while adjusting to conditions that are best for its survival. If homeostasis is successful, life continues; if it's unsuccessful, it results in a disaster or death of the organism.

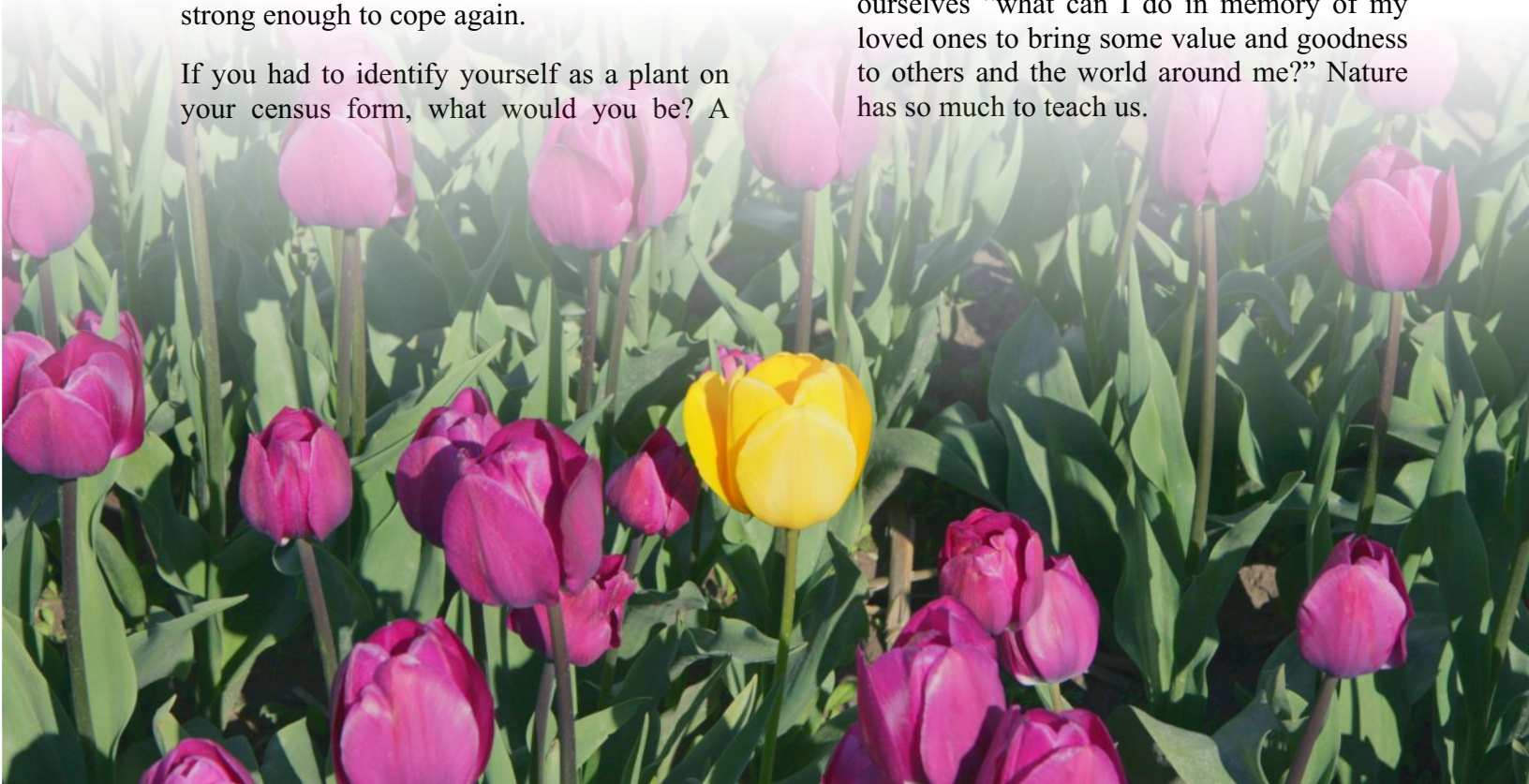
Our goal as bereaved persons is to find and utilize that part of our being that finds a healthy balance between the heart, mind and soul that will bring us to some centering and return to stability in whatever form that is for each individual. Grief knocks us off balance, may disconnect us from our stabilizing roots, and put us in a place where we feel vulnerable and exposed to the elements, just like an unsheltered plant that may be trampled without warning by a hailstorm. Death creates that same uncertainty of impending doom—an unexpected disaster that can uproot us, and leave us exposed and injured, and waiting for someone to pick us back up and set us in a safe place until we are strong enough to cope again.

If you had to identify yourself as a plant on your census form, what would you be? A

Thunderchild Crabapple tree who blazes through adversity with little regard for what lies ahead, our beloved Snowdrop, (a flower of hope) that you hold close to see you through life's challenges, or a Dandelion that pushes thru the pavement stubbornly defying anything in its way? Maybe you are more like a Shrinking Violet or delicate Rose that is totally reliant on everything in its perimeter to be ideal or it immediately reacts negatively when slighted, injured or neglected?

The greenhouses are a wonderful place to visit, especially in the winter when we miss the greenery and vitality of the plants, and I always feel happier when I have spent some time visiting the garden centre. For those who are not mobile and able to walk around the Muttart Conservatory, Botanical Gardens or Big Lake, a nice drive out into the country to see the trees change colour before fall, or the evergreens laden in snow before Christmas may be more convenient. Either one will give you an instant facelift as you smile your way back home!

Plants create something of value for others. The calming effects of plants, their medicinal value, and their role in keeping the earth's ecosystem in balance are gifts that plants offer to all of us. So, we need to ask ourselves "what can I do in memory of my loved ones to bring some value and goodness to others and the world around me?" Nature has so much to teach us.



Finally, there is another grief coping tool I became aware of recently that I would like to share with you. The bereaved have long been encouraged to journal their thoughts and to reread their journal entries months and years later to appreciate the lessons learned along their journey and to recognize how far they have come since their loss. The newest form of journaling is called “photo-journaling”.

Since most folks have a cellphone nowadays, it is easy to take pictures... walking the dog, people watching, back yard, anywhere. Just capture anything that catches your eye and try to reflect on your picture as to what drew you to that image and how it might illustrate what you are feeling or thinking in that moment. Did you find a crack in the sidewalk and did that resonate with the brokenness inside that you were unable to explain in words as well as a photograph might do.

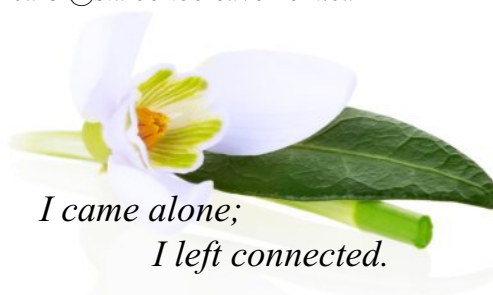
A picture I took a few years ago of a rose growing through a fence and blooming brightly showed me that we can push through the barriers in front of us and live to bloom another day on the other side of obstacles that once limited us. You will find what speaks to you; and your photo-journaling is a wonderful

way to watch your moods change from time to time; sometimes dark and dreary as reflected in your photos...or notably more positive images as time goes on. You may find it a helpful exercise in your healing to document your own journey.

I have enjoyed spending this time with you; and hope that we might bump into each other one day at the greenhouse or while having a Teddy Bear Picnic at the Botanical Park...sharing the beauty of a rich and powerful environment that heals simply by “being”. We at Links, wish everyone a “sunflower” trait of turning towards each other on our cloudy and gloomy days.

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With gratitude for References/Contributions from:

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, Ellison Chair in International Floriculture “Health and Well-being Benefits of Plants” (Brethour, Collins, Dunnet, Etkoff, Frank, Haviland-Jones, Hartig, McFarland, Rappe, Waliczek, Pohmer, Serwach, Shibata, Yannick, Barnicle Faber Taylor, Grinde, Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, Shoemaker, Wolfe, Austin, Bisco Werner, Younis, Brown, Brunson, Kellert, Kuo, Lieberman, Mitchell, The Trust for Public Land, Sallis, Friend, Lohr, Park, Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Assn., Ulrich, Hagen, Bernstein, Bringslimark, Dravigne, Kaplan, Rappe, Shoemaker, University of Rochester, Barnicle, Grinde, McFarland, Nadel, Phipps Botanical Gardens and Conservatory, Brown, Brunson, Wolf, Kohlleppe, Ulrich, Waliczek, Aldous, Stoneham, Appleseed, Inc. 2009, Dubey, Nadel, Phipps Botanical Gardens & Conservatory).

Jason Daley, smithsonianmag.com Aug. 5, 2016 “Research Reveals How and Why Sunflowers Turn Their Golden Heads”.

Karen Cudby “Everyone Should Not Miss These 15 Life Lessons Plants Teach Us”

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